

“Arts-Based Research: Promise and Perils”

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My Background

- ▶ I'm a sociologist. I studied women's lives for many years. Then I turned to the arts. Now I write novels based on my research. This presentation explains why.

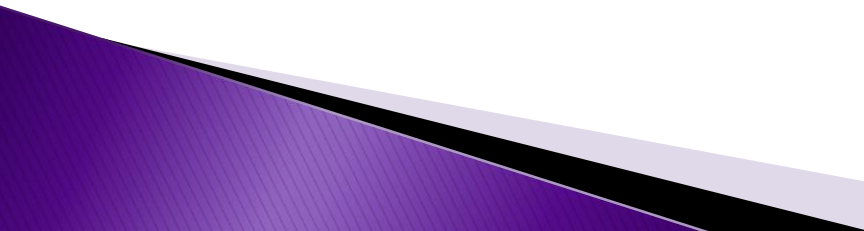
Academic Writing: Who reads it?

- ▶ Highly limited audience (academic peers) prohibitive jargon and limited venues. They are inaccessible.
 - Academic articles in the social sciences and humanities typically have an audience of 3-8 readers

Academic Writing: Is it any good?

- ▶ Academic writing is often stale and dry writing
- ▶ The essence of the stories doesn't always come through
- ▶ Frustration with traditional ways of sharing the stories I had learned as well as my insights lead me to arts-based research


What is Arts-Based Research?

- ▶ Arts-based research practices are methodological tools that adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address research questions in engaged ways. They can be used for data generation, analysis, and representation or as the entire method of inquiry (Leavy, 2021).
 - ▶ ABR can be used in any discipline or field of study.
 - ▶ ABR requires researchers to think conceptually, symbolically, metaphorically (Saldaña, 2011) and thematically and requires us to use intuition, creativity, and flexibility.
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Art Forms

- ▶ Arts-based practices draw on literary, performative, and visual arts genres.
- ▶ Representational forms include but are not limited to short stories, novels, novellas, experimental writing forms, graphic novels, comics, poems, parables, collages, paintings, drawings, sculpture, 3-D art, quilts, needlework, performance scripts, theatrical performances, dance, films, songs, and musical scores.

Strengths of ABR for Facilitating Research Goals

- Sensitively portraying the complexity of lived experience
 - Promoting empathy and reflection
 - Forging macro-micro links
 - Disrupting stereotypes or dominant ideologies
 - Public scholarship– making research available to multiple audiences
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“The Science” of Art

- ▶ We experience art differently than other forms
- ▶ “Literary neuroscience” examines how literature impacts our brains.
- ▶ Natalie Phillips has shown that Jane Austen novels engage the entire brain, including regions associated with touch, allowing us to get immersed in what we are reading.
- ▶ A study published in the journal [Brain Connectivity](#) (2013) suggested that there is heightened connectivity in our brains for days after reading a novel.

Low-Fat Love

I took what I learned through my research and wrote my debut novel titled, *Low-Fat Love*.

LOW-Fat
LOVE

10th Anniversary Edition

Patricia
Leavy

Low-Fat Love explores women settling in life and love, unhealthy relationships patterns, self-esteem, and toxic popular culture.

The Response to *Low-Fat Love*

- ▶ Bombarded by readers emailing me and seeking me out at book events, conferences and in university hallways to tell me their stories of low-fat love
- ▶ The novel became a springboard for people to reflect on and share their own relationship and identity stories (emotional stories)
- ▶ Readers frequently said things like:
 - “You made me care about regular people.”
 - “You wrote my life.”

More novels

- ▶ I've been writing novels ever since. Most recently, *Shooting Stars* explores how love, in all forms, helps people heal from past trauma and abuse.
- ▶ There are great rewards doing this work, but also challenges.



The Promise and Perils of ABR

- ▶ Critical storytelling
 - Sharing stories that may otherwise be invisible
- ▶ Deep engagement and lasting learning
- ▶ Public scholarship
 - Reaching diverse stakeholders
- Despite the many advantages of ABR, this work can be misunderstood or undervalued by those unfamiliar with it, and it can be difficult to secure funding for this research
- My experience shows me the rewards outweigh the challenges

References

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For more information visit

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